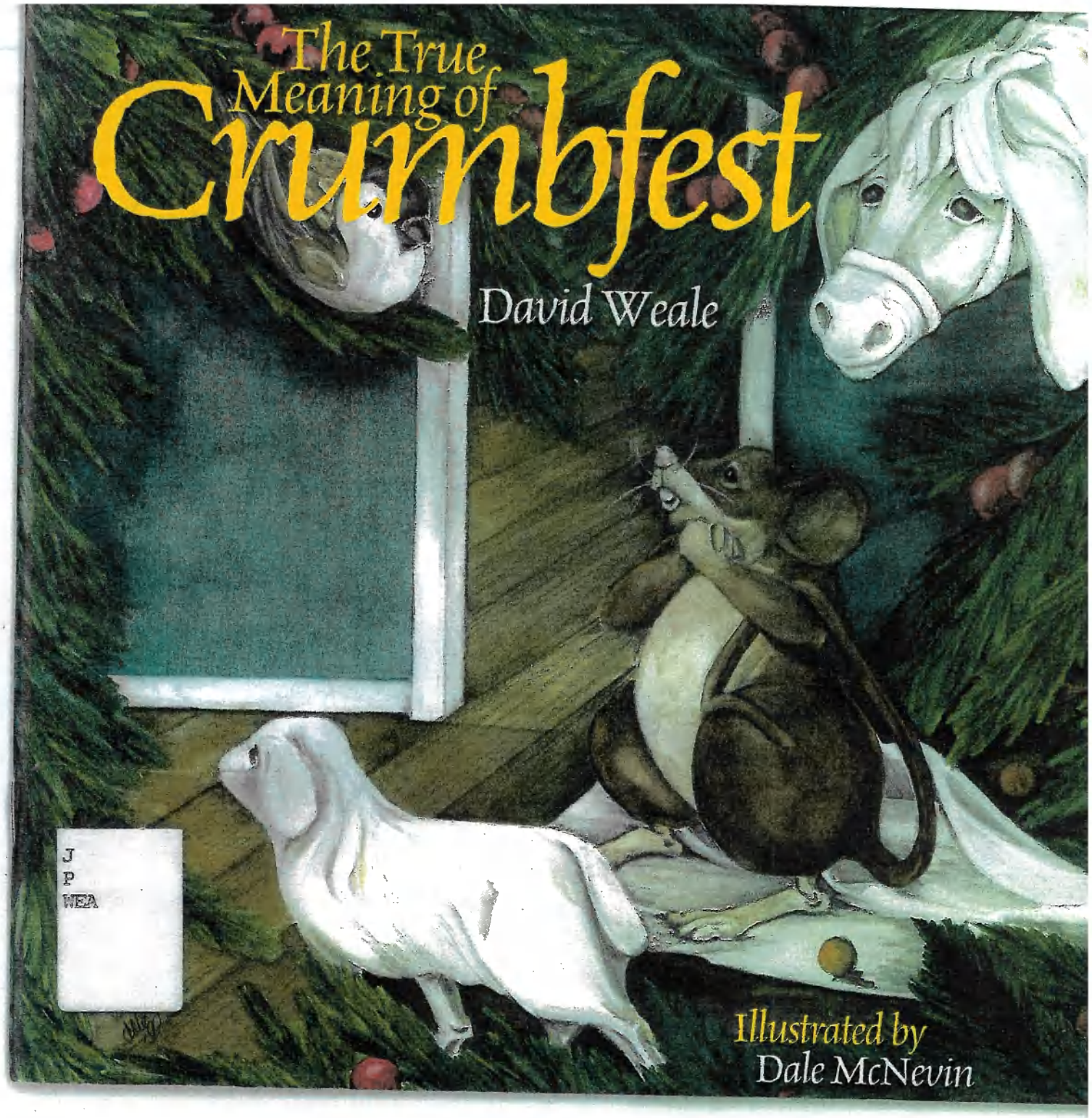

The True Meaning of
Crumbfest
David Weale
Illustrated by
Dale McNevin

J
P
WEA

YJ
PI
8.00
P 5/02

The True Meaning of Crumbfest

by

David Weale

illustrations by

Dale McNevin

Story © 1999 by David Weale
Illustrations © 1999 by Dale McNevin

Design by Matthew MacKay
Printed and bound in Canada
by Williams and Crue

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Weale, David, 1942-

The True Meaning of Crumbfest
ISBN 0-9698606-4-1

I. McNevin, Dale, 1945- II. Title.

PS8595.E15T7 1999 jC813'.54 C99-950221-2
PZ7. W352Tr 1999

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

"The True Meaning of Crumbfest" originally appeared in *An Island Christmas Reader* by David Weale (Acorn Press, 1994).

The Acorn Press
P.O. Box 22024
Charlottetown,
Prince Edward Island
Canada C1A 9J2

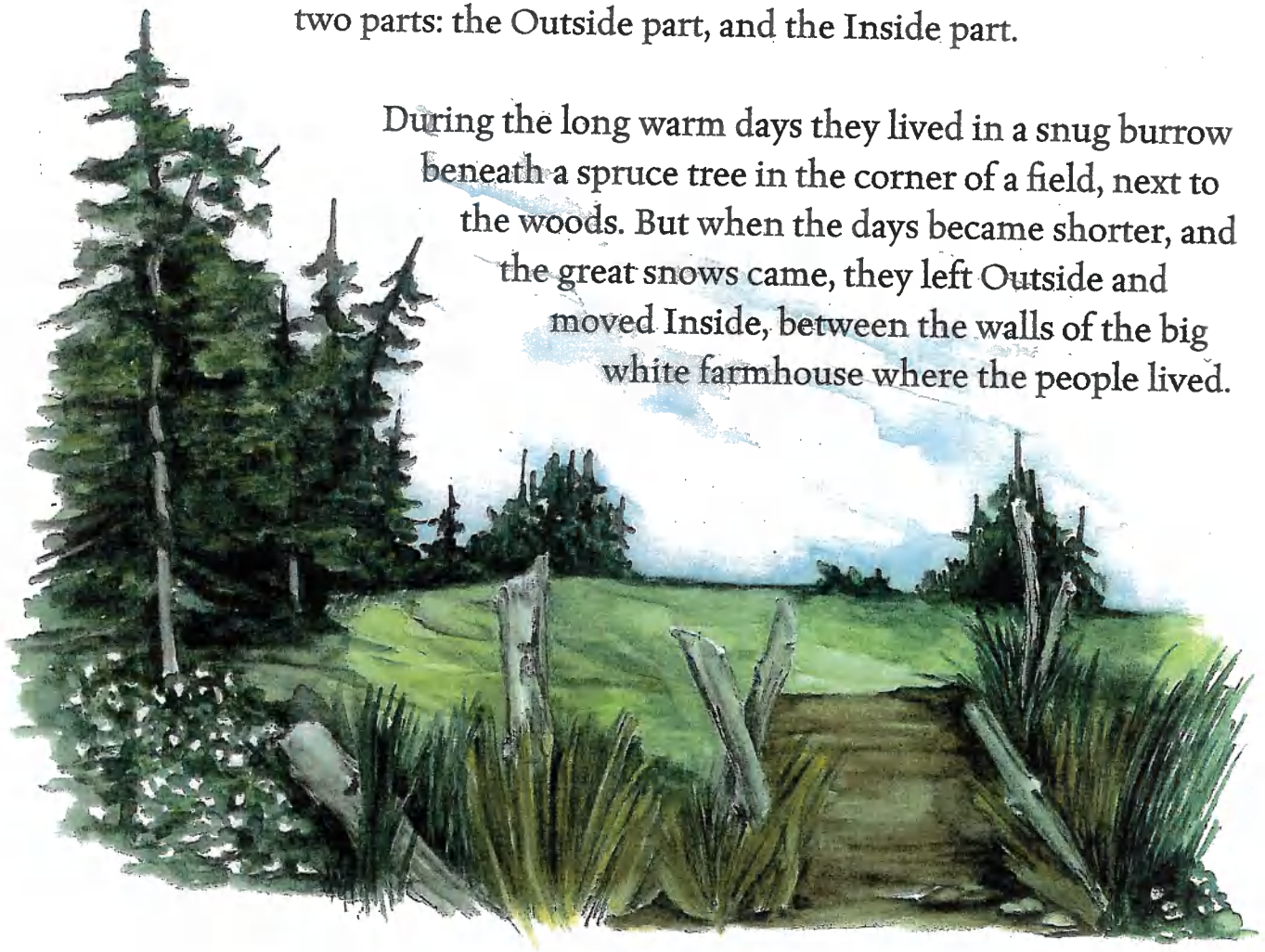
3 9525 02308 1814
YORK LIBRARY REGION

his is the story of ECKHART, a young mouse, with quick tiny feet, shiny black eyes and an extra-long tail. He lived with his family in a place called Rose Valley, Prince Edward Island.

It is also the story of a very great mystery; a mystery which all the mice in Rose Valley talked about, but which was never solved until the day ECKHART set off on his great adventure. It was the day he went boldly where no mouse had gone before, and discovered the true meaning of Crumbfest.

For ECKHART and the other mice, every year was divided into two parts: the Outside part, and the Inside part.

During the long warm days they lived in a snug burrow beneath a spruce tree in the corner of a field, next to the woods. But when the days became shorter, and the great snows came, they left Outside and moved Inside, between the walls of the big white farmhouse where the people lived.



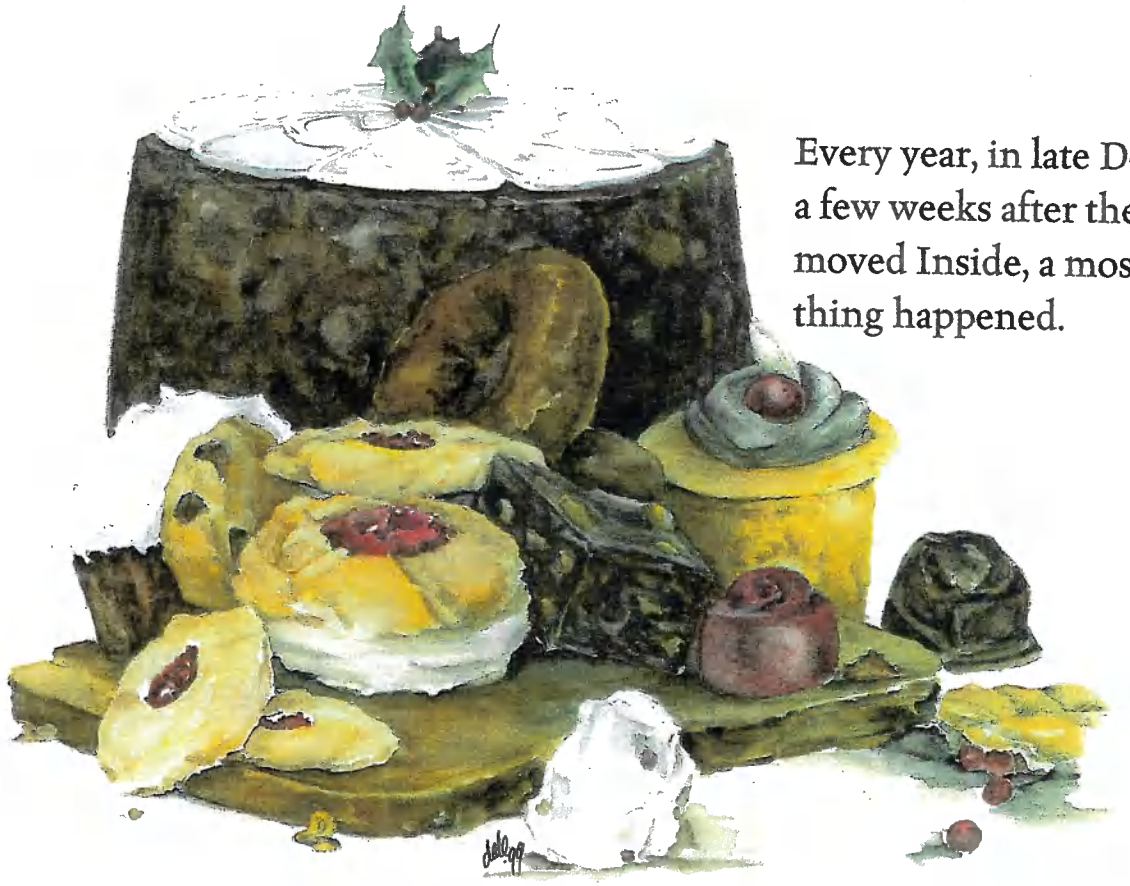
The mice, of course, didn't refer to them as people. They called them "the straight ones," because of the way they walked.

ECKHART didn't like the idea of going Inside. None of the mice did. The narrow space between the walls, where they would spend the winter, was a cold, dismal place. There was no grass there, or trees, or flowers; and no sunshine.

The Inside was also a hungry place.

There was plenty of food there, but at night, the only time it was safe to go searching, it was almost always shut up in the little pantry off the kitchen—in jars, or tins with tight covers. The only place the mice could find food was on the kitchen floor, beneath the big wooden table where the people ate. There would usually be a few crumbs there: tiny bits of bread or biscuit which had tumbled down from above.

But there was one time of the year when all that changed.



Every year, in late December, just a few weeks after the mice had moved Inside, a most astonishing thing happened.

Suddenly! as if by magic, there were crumbs everywhere. For several days the mice feasted, not just on bread or biscuit, but on cake, and cookies, and pie-crust.

The mice had a name for this time of abundance. They called it Crumbfest, and over the years it became the most important celebration in mouse society. "Merry Crumbfest," they would call out to one another as they scurried in and out of their hole in the wall, bringing back load after load of tasty morsels.

The young mice, like ECKHART, who had been born Outside during the summer, had only heard stories about Crumbfest, and so they looked forward to it with almost unbearable excitement.

"Is it really as crumby as they say?" ECKHART asked his mother.

"Oh yes, dear," she would answer, "it is the crumbiest time of the whole year."

ECKHART's grandfather, a skinny bent old mouse named TOMIS, had lived longer than any of the other mice. He had celebrated three Crumbfests, and ECKHART asked him once why it happened every year.

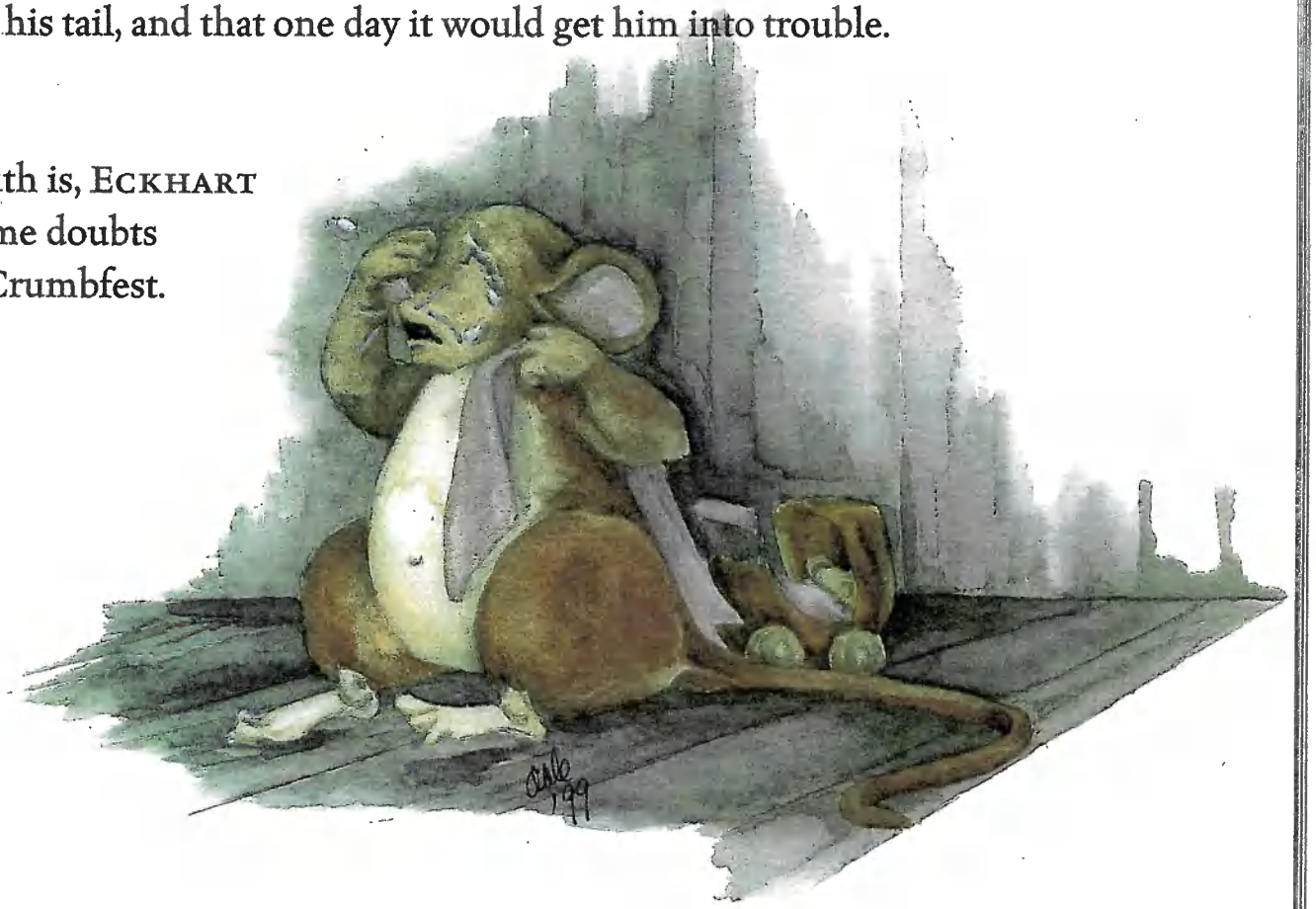
Old TOMIS said he didn't know. He said it was a mystery. When ECKHART asked him a second time he twitched his tail in annoyance. "Don't ask so many questions," he said crossly.

"Crumbfest happens, and that's all there is to it! Just be thankful, and don't waste your time trying to know things that mice can never know."

"I'm warning you, Master Eckhart," he added in a serious voice, "if you ask too many questions you may just ruin it for yourself and everyone else."

ECKHART felt puzzled and hurt. He didn't like to upset his grandfather, but he just wasn't satisfied with the old mouse's answer. ECKHART, you see, was a most curious creature. Indeed, his mother told him once that his curiosity was just as long as his tail, and that one day it would get him into trouble.

The truth is, ECKHART had some doubts about Crumbfest.



He thought maybe it was just a story the old mice had made up to help pass the time during the long, dark, Inside days. He once told his little sister, MAVIS, that there was no such thing as Crumbfest, and she burst into tears. "Eckhart," she sobbed, "you are a hateful, horrid brother."

But then, one day, just when ECKHART was beginning to feel certain that he was right, the crumbs appeared.

It was amazing! Absolutely amazing!

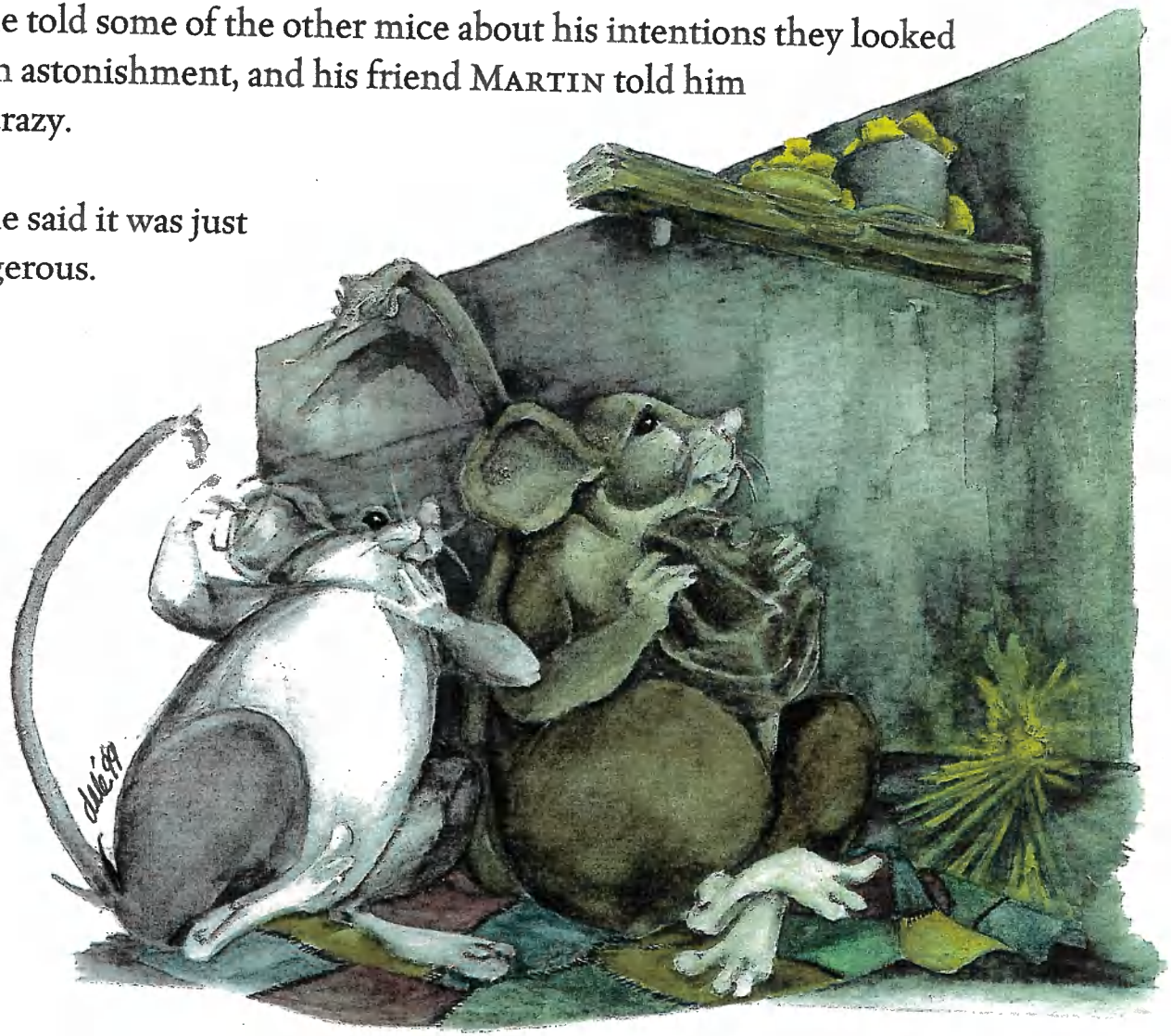
The word spread quickly between the walls. "They've arrived! They've arrived!" everyone was shouting. "The crumbs are here!"

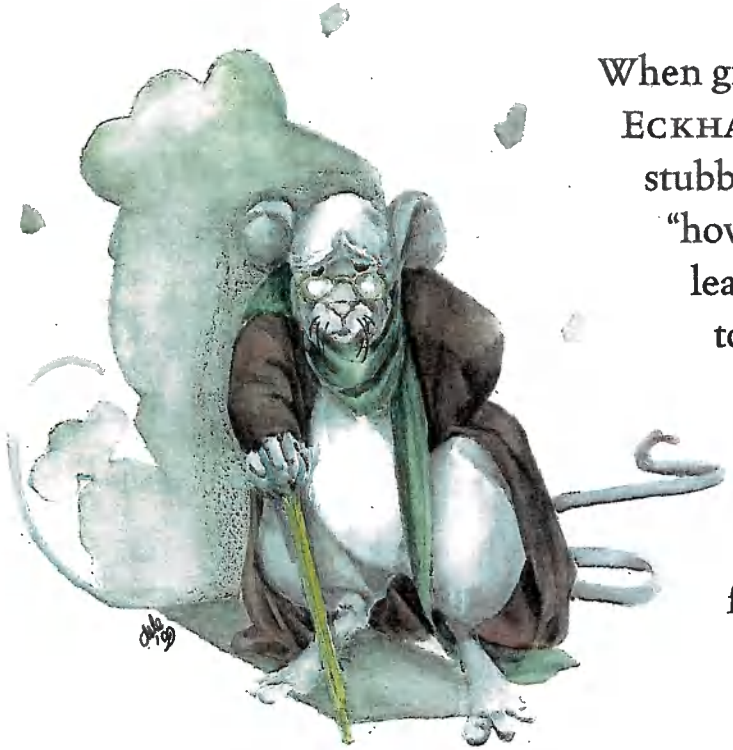
ECKHART had never seen such excitement. Everyone was happy. Even TOMIS, who hardly ever smiled, seemed to be in a good mood. And no one was more joyous than ECKHART. His dark little eyes were shining with delight as mouse after mouse came scampering back through the hole in the wall, cheeks bulging with delicious Crumbfest goodies.

But all of that just made ECKHART even more curious. On the second day of Crumbfest, as he sat chewing on a big sticky raisin, he started thinking again about the reason for this most mysterious event. Right there and then he decided he must solve the riddle. He made up his mind to go exploring.

When he told some of the other mice about his intentions they looked at him in astonishment, and his friend MARTIN told him he was crazy.

Everyone said it was just too dangerous.





When grandfather TOMIS learned of ECKHART's plan he shook his head. "You stubborn little scallywag," he scolded, "how long is it going to take you to learn your place in this world? I've told you over and over that mice are creatures of the Outside. We are not meant to know the secrets of the Inside. Besides, there's too much danger in it. It's too risky—far too risky!"

Old TOMIS dropped his head and continued muttering in his whiskers. It seemed he had forgotten all about ECKHART, and was talking to himself.

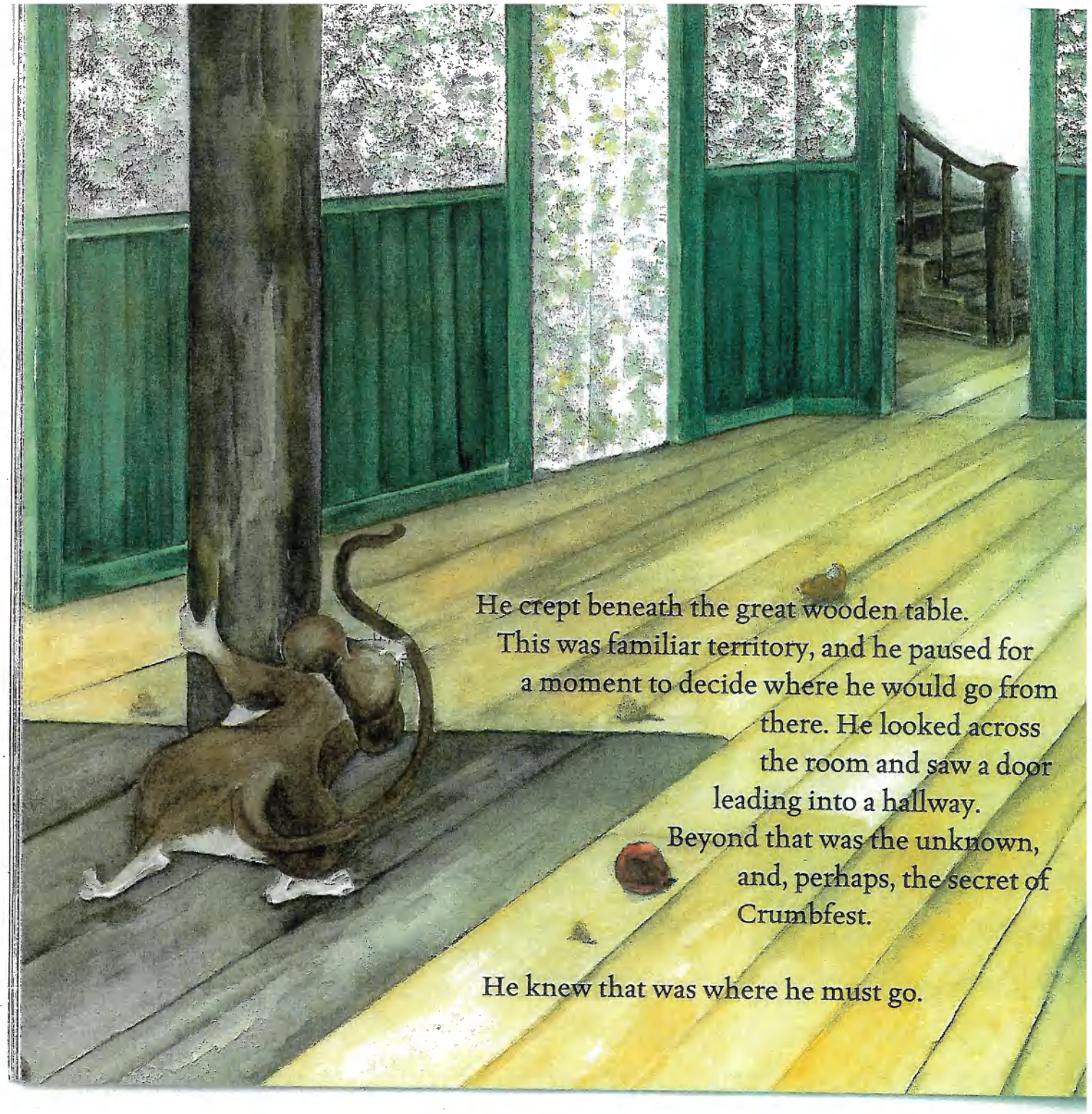
Without saying a word, ECKHART left the old mouse. He scurried to the hole in the wall and out into the kitchen.

It was the middle of the night and the room was dark. But there was a moon Outside, and it shone through the windows, giving ECKHART just enough light to see where he was going.

It was also very quiet.

Not a creature was stirring—

except ECKHART.

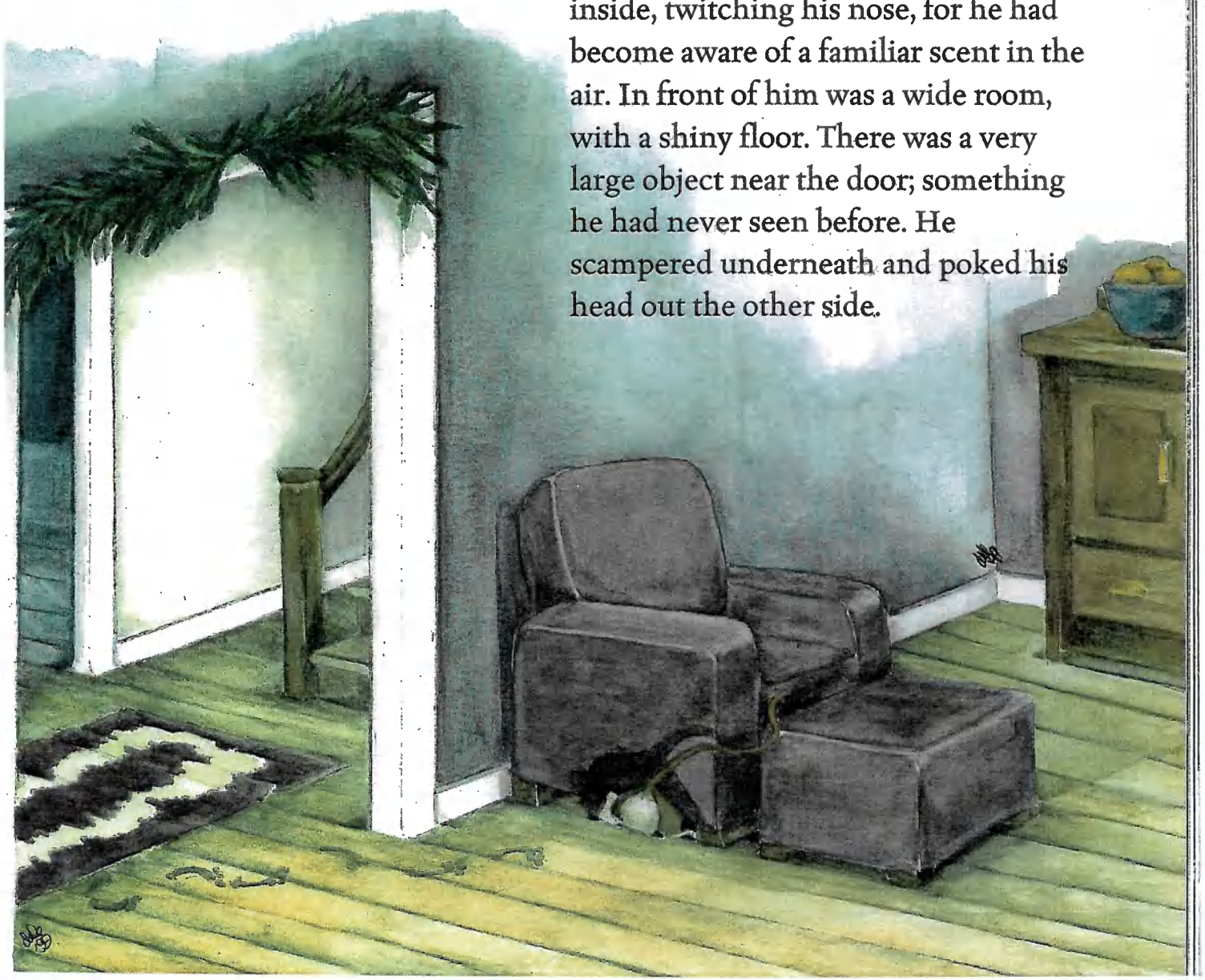


He crept beneath the great wooden table. This was familiar territory, and he paused for a moment to decide where he would go from there. He looked across the room and saw a door leading into a hallway. Beyond that was the unknown, and, perhaps, the secret of Crumbfest.

He knew that was where he must go.

As he passed through the doorway he could feel his heart pounding.

He moved slowly at first, but then scampered across a mat to another doorway. He stopped and peered inside, twitching his nose, for he had become aware of a familiar scent in the air. In front of him was a wide room, with a shiny floor. There was a very large object near the door; something he had never seen before. He scampered underneath and poked his head out the other side.



ECKHART could scarcely believe his eyes.

He blinked and looked again, but sure enough, it was still there.

It was a fir tree.

A beautiful green tree from the Outside was right there in front of him, on the Inside.

ECKHART ran over quickly and looked up into the branches. There, on the tree, were other things from the Outside.

There was a long string of red berries—the kind that grow on the rose bushes along the fence—and some birds.

They didn't look exactly like the birds he had seen Outside, but they were definitely birds, sitting very still in the branches.

It was all very surprising, and strange, and something told ECKHART that it must have something to do with Crumbfest, though he wasn't sure what.

There was a small table beside the tree and ECKHART climbed up to get a better view. He ran quickly up one of the legs and when he came up over the top there was another great surprise waiting for him.

There, gathered in a circle,
were tiny animals from the Outside.

There were two cows, a horse with long ears and several sheep.

There were also some tiny people there, and right in the middle a little box, with a baby sleeping in some straw.

ECKHART walked over slowly and stood beside one of the sheep, which was just exactly the same size as he was. He remained there quietly for a few moments, standing just as still as the other animals.

And that's when it happened!

ECKHART felt something he had never felt before.
It started somewhere inside him, and spread out to
the very tips of all his whiskers, and the end of
his extra-long tail.

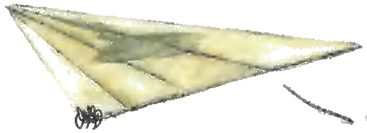
It wasn't exactly astonishment, and it wasn't exactly joy.
It was wonder, that's what it was.

ECKHART felt wonder-full.

It only lasted a short time, but he knew in that moment that he
had discovered the meaning of Crumbfest.

It came to him in a flash, and he knew his journey was over.
It was now time to go back to the other mice and tell them
his story.

He scampered down to the floor,
and, with one last look
at the tree,
ran quickly
across
the shiny floor,

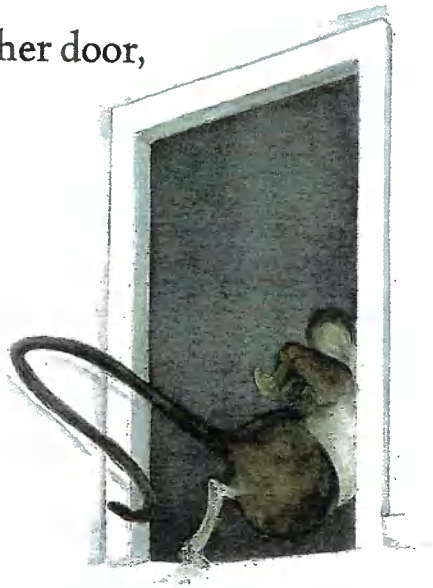


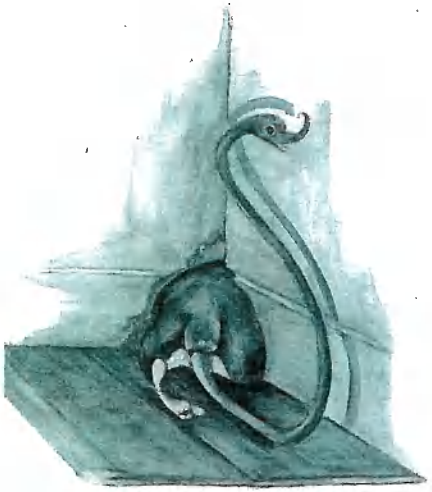
under the large object,

out through the door,

across the mat,

through the other door,





under the great table
where the crumbs were,

and into the hole in the corner.

When he arrived back between the walls the other mice could tell immediately that something sensational had happened. ECKHART had been away a half an hour—which is quite a long time for a mouse—and he looked different. Soon they were all gathered around him.

"Where have you been?" they asked. "What have you seen?" Even grandfather TOMIS, looking especially interested, came close enough to hear.

ECKHART told them the story of his journey. He told them about the big room, the tree, the berries and the birds. And when he got to the part about the animals he lowered his head, straightened his tail, and said softly, "The mystery of Crumbfest is the mystery of the Outside and the Inside. When the Outside comes in and the Inside comes out, it is a special time, for when the Outside and the Inside meet, Crumbfest happens."

For a moment no one spoke. Most of the mice looked puzzled. And TOMIS scowled. But there were a few whose eyes opened very wide, as though they had just heard a secret they already knew.

In the years that followed, the telling
and retelling of ECKHART's tale
became an important part
of the Crumbfest celebrations.

Most of the mice still didn't go
farther than the crumbs beneath
the table, but there were a few
who followed ECKHART's trail through
the doorway.

Like ECKHART they experienced
for themselves the mystery of Crumbfest,
and the wonder of a place where
the *Inside* and the *Outside* are together.

The End